

# The Atonement in J.S. Bach's Matthaus Passion

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[ 0 : 00 ] Order on and we'll embark into our journey. Well, I'm honored to be invited again. And I'm not sure if I'm really a star.

One that's trinkling. And I'm sure it's little. As I'm counting how many PhDs am I speaking to in this room.

I can count a handful, of course. But we're missing Olaf. That's great Olaf. Anyways, so, topic for this morning is the Atonement Theory in Boxing Matthew Passion.

And as with last time, I'm going to speak a little Eutrushan, unfamiliar language, musical jargon that is.

And a little of GRE, Graduate Entrance Exam, that dreaded vocabalist. And less Greek. Unlike the St. John's Passion, which I presented half a year ago, St. Matthew Passion is a mammoth piece of work.

[ 1 : 18 ] It's almost like a dog's breakfast, I want to use a specially Australian idiom. It's all over the place. It's funky. It's all over the place.

I'm unable to distill it to something clean and crystallized like that of the St. John's. So, I have to apologize for being a little heavy, a little saturated this morning.

It's just the nature of the work. So, before we really start, let us first pray, because we're talking about a holy subject. Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, has sent thy Son, our Lord, Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross.

We therefore beseech thee in this season of Advent. Help us orient our thoughts to thy incarnation. And through the music of thy servant, Johann Sebastian Bach, look forward to thy passion.

Through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. Although we cannot be conclusive, it seems more likely now that Bach had completed the St.

[ 2 : 36 ] Matthew Passion by the spring of 1727, which is not long after what perhaps was the most intensively creative period of his life.

He just finished the St. John's Passion and two life-sync cantata cycles. To our knowledge, Bach began his collaboration with Kincanda, the librettist for this work, at the very latest by February of 1725.

And it is possible that the plans for St. Matthew Passion were set in motion as much as two years before the presumed date of performance in 1727.

Before we embark into the musical theological discussion, let us recall a couple of musical terminologies.

In an operatic work, a speech like Resistative passage carries the narrative, which leads to the emotional discharge, in a monologue in the form of an aria.

[ 3 : 46 ] In the case of a Passion Oratorial, the scripture narrative is carried by the Rest of Sativ, and the corresponding meditative thoughts are sung in aria.

Is that okay? So, action, meditate. And recalling from our discussion of the St. John's Passion, the Resistative carries the crucifixion text in the Gospel of John up to the very words, It is finished, which demarcates the death of Christ on the cross.

And, as if time had frozen, an aria as is full bronze is sung. So the cross, right at the place on the aria.

This scheme is completely appropriate and logical since the death of Christ should be at the crux of any Passion narrative. In the St. Matthew Passion, however, things are very different.

The Resistative passage carries right through the death of Christ, and the aria does not come in until much later. In fact, right before Joseph buried the body of Christ, as recorded in Matthew 27,

verse 59, the Holy Spirit, to be precise.

[ 5 : 16 ] No stoppage. No meditation on the death of the Savior. So, part of the crucifixion, right here. In action.

This peculiar displacement between the cross and the formal structure of the music, raised a question concerning the theology of the cross in this masterpiece. Why did Bach displace the pan-ultimate moment to a place of seemingly insignificance?

It behooves me, however, that before, prior to engaging the musical aspect of our discussion, we should understand the theology of the cross according to the Gospel of Matthew.

And we will do this vis-a-vis that of John's Gospel. According to John's Gospel, Logos became flesh, and tabernacle among us, and we beheld his boxa.

John 1, 14. Reading from the Matthew's account, however, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken.

[ 6 : 37 ] Hence, the former sees the incarnation as the revelation of God's glory, and the latter understands the incarnation as the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant.

Indeed, the language of fulfillment, the fulfillment discourse, is evident throughout this account. In addition, only recorded in the book of Matthew, the Magi and their gifts are also closely associated with the birth of Jesus.

Now, confirming that we do not learn our theology from Christmas cards, the Bible only informs us that there are three gifts.

We don't know how many Magi were present. In fact, I hypothesize that the actual number of gifts are also unknown. Because why? Because Matthew only records those that are salient to his message.

Now, according to traditional, i.e. medieval reading, these gifts are symbols of Christology. Gold, representing his kingship.

[ 7 : 51 ] Frankincense as his priesthood, and myrrh as his death. However, it is brought to my attention, as I was rectified by our rector, that this reading was a medieval invention.

So there is a little short in my presentation here. Quoting from John Calvin's commentary.

Almost all commentators indulge in the speculation that these gifts are denoting the kingdom, priesthood, and burial of Christ. They make gold the symbol of kingdom, frankincense as his priesthood, and myrrh of his burial.

I see no ground for such an opinion. So that's John Calvin speaking, and I think that's the position which our rector holds, and more appropriate, and I think that will mean the position that our church holds.

If I'm allowed to say that. I'm aware that it's recorded. But since Bach, an 18th century Lutheran, is more likely to incline towards the medieval interpretation, we should for the purpose of this presentation, follow this allegorical reading.

[ 9 : 17 ] Hence, taking previous points into account, the incarnation is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, and they are achieved through the death of Christ.

In another word, Jesus was born to die. His death was ordained. Now let us modulate to music.

The St. Matthew Passion begins in the key of E minor. A key which Johann Matheson, a music theorist and contemporary of Bach, describes as very pensive of profound thoughts, to make uns gloomy and sad, yet so that one still hopes to console oneself.

The opening chorus is a tombole, a French-style funeral music, with full double chorus and a treble choir. So you will hear, choir one, choir two, and boys choir on stage somewhere.

And of course orchestra split. Try to listen for that. And here's the text. See if you can catch. Um, where's what? And it is absolutely great music. I just can't resist myself from playing the whole thing.

[ 10 : 40 ] Just enjoy. For the Lord not for both of us. Please recognize toth seekers of the name of bogatón and brats proud of bangse. Please pray. Let us pray for you. Which one truly ■PERATION Daniels has torment of the governor.

Good. For sure to behold him. Is that pleasant? We must go both. Thank you grow that night.

How does the Senhor have all victory or that of birth? The Son has begun! Why does the central one nowzi merit? Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[14:07] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.

extras we're going to listen to will only play parts. Short snippets. It's a long one song. Okay.

[17:48] There are two major components to this choral panthasea. A dialogue, dialogue, and a chorale.

The latter, the chorale, was taken up by the treble choir. It's on the chorale, O Lamb of God, which is the Lutheran's version, Agnus Dei, or our version of O Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, and have mercy upon us.

See, we know this by heart. They would know that by heart too. So this familiar melody will recapitulate in the trial scene. The content of the dialogue is a series of come and behold addressed by Sion, choir one, which is respond by single interrogative pronouns, and choir two.

The object of beholding is Bridegroom, Lamb, Patience, Guilt, Love, and Cross.

With the exception of guilt, which is prevalent throughout the oratorio, these motifs will be developed later on in the work, which I'm not interested in pursuing in this talk.

[19:33] This one I'm actually suspicious that it will take two parts, so I forgot to mention about that. Moreover, the typology of dialogues also form an integral discourse in the piece, that is, a discourse developed from a series of dialogue movements.

There are eight dialogue movements dispersed throughout the passion.

Five in part one, three in part two. What is the dialogue? Meditative movements involving two performance groups. So we've got a dialogue that the opening movement is based on, and there are other dialogue type movements, through the remainder of the work, that carries its own discourse.

Excluding *Compte-il-Tata*, the dialogues in part one falls in the two categories, while *Ojeet's*, *O-Pain*, *I-chil-Fa-bae-na-yes-io-vachshin*, and *Shû-i-s-mae-i-su-nan-ge-fagin*, revolves around the recognition of sin, and the need for atonement.

*O-Mensch* outlines the incarnation and the cross. Incarnation, Cross. *O-Mensch* looks forward to the whole, to the hope of sin which have been recognized earlier on to be atoned for by penal substitution.

[21:26] Until the time, until it came a time that he would sacrifice for us. So it's a looking forward, sort of no chief, looking forward for the sin recognized here to be atoned for.

This hope is signified more intensively by the contrasting of key of crucifixion, E minor, in the beginning, in the very pessimistic opening tumble chorus, with its parallel major key, E major of *Omench*, in the closing movements.

Everyone's clear what the major and minor keys are, right? If not, we've got the Tippett family here, and they'll each take a part and sing a major triad, and your partner will sing a minor triad.

I can give you a bass. It's okay? Okay. Okay. Okay. So, a little more technical.

Those of you who have any form of a musical background, this is the dreaded cycle of fifths, which outlines different key signatures. So, look at the piano, white key, black key.

[22:44] Okay? White key is our default. Black key is alternations to the default. So, if you need to click a key higher than your default, go sharp. Go to black key.

You need an alternation below, go to black key below. Okay? So, if you start from C to C, you will have the major scale.

We'll call it a major scale. Do-re-vi-ta-so-la-ti-do. Now, you can get the same kind of sonority if you start at a different place, but one or more of those keys in the middle, intervening keys, intervening white keys, need to be altered.

Okay? The more alternation required, the farther away you are from its original. Okay? So, here I express. C is nothing, default.

One alteration on the flat side, F. Two alteration on the flat side, B flat. Same thing. One alteration on the sharp side, G. One two alteration on the sharp side, D major.

[23:46] So, the major side of things, and there's also the minor mode. A minor is our default, and following the same logic. One alteration, two alterations.

Okay? Start again. That's the essence of how western key works. Okay? Okay. Okay.

So, the musical material, all the movements, not just dialogues, between O-schutz, which is here in F minor, and O-mensch, which is here, is actually a journey through the cycle.

Okay? From B major, which is our goal, four sharps, to its main goal, E, four sharps, from its antithetical key.

F minor, four flats. Okay? So, moving from one end of the spectrum, to the other end of the spectrum. From, in that space of time. And Bach did it intentionally.

[ 24 : 54 ] So, beginning with O-schutz, which is F minor. And moving to Ich will in C minor.

And as if the audience might forget how E minor sounds like, Shuu is my Ye-shuu, which is in E minor, movement number 33, just two before I go, sounds right here.

Okay? So, 33, 34, 35 is E major. Same key level. Okay? Same key level.

You can hear the contrast between parallel keys, major and minor. Okay? And E minor is the key that was part of the chord of course.

So, in general, the progression from the B flat key of F minor, F. Sorry.

[ 26 : 05 ] In general, the progression from the B flat key of F minor, in O-schutz, is a progression of a recognition of sin to the hope of atonement in E major.

So, this sort of thing, this sort of thing being musically realized. So, musically realized the transformation from the grave of the recognition of sin that is needed to be atoned for, to the optimism of the promised atonement.

Hence, part one closed with great anticipation. Whip me so far? That's a status against. Okay.

Okay. Okay. If part, if the dialogue movements in part one creates a sense of anticipated hope and optimism, then, following the Matthew discourse, the movements in part two express the fulfillment of this great promise, of the great promise of atonement.

Okay. So, establishing what we need and the fulfillment of what we need. That's in part two, the second half of the oratorio. Now, the analysis of part two can be sub-defined into three complexes, which will very quickly run through over the part of time.

[ 27 : 39 ] Each of which is related to part one in a certain way, and they are being color coded.

Three different colors, three different discourse. Alright. So, our first discourse here involves the return of the lamb motif.

So, having closed the previous section with an air of hopeful optimism, the opening movement of the second part of the St. Matthew's Passion is set in the minor key.

The purpose of this resetting back to the minor mode is to prepare the listener for the reality of the upcoming trial scene, which correspond, of course, to Matthew 26, 57 to 27, 44.

Now, the first reference of the lamb motif in this preparatory dialogue is referenced in its text.

Alas, my lamb is in the claws of tiger. So, that's our first reference of lamb. Now, the subsequent trial scene features a series of chorus movement called, Turvai, which functions as the force of the crowd, chiefly to prosecutors of Christ.

[ 29 : 07 ] It is in these voices of antagonism that Bach works the return of all lamb goddess chorale into. That is, each Turvai chorus is based on a section of the Lutheran amnus Dei.

The most recognizable return of the chorale is found in the ends of the series. Air is that's taught to strolling, and under hot air get hoovered.

That's the original chorale that every single Lutheran will remember, just like how we remember our version. And this is the concealed version coming back, the first one.

Here's the second version.

Not too obvious. Right here. Is that clear?

[ 30 : 27 ] Okay. Okay. Okay. So, from the ends of Thisa Toba choruses forms a chiasm. With the statement, let them be crucified occupying the chiastic center.

Now, notice that these just opposing choruses are set a tonal step apart. So, you would expect the second one to sound higher than the first one.

See if you can hear that. Ginsuji th■y konaou cat Because you don't know that it is so small, and you'd love to hear it from Instagram and i would tell you what, just like how you ■■■■■■ The purpose of this transposition is to create motion through the narrative.

In other words, Bach do not want his audience to dwell on the statement, let him be crucified. He wants same-y, hence its chiastic position, but only in a local sense.

Thus, the Lamb, which is the subject of this complex, was led to be crucified by the voices of our sin, which is represented by antagonism.

[ 32 : 26 ] Back to our first thing. We dealt with this. Now to our second thing in yellow.

The second dialogue movement in a part 2 forms our second complex with the opening chorus of fantasy. Similar to the opening chorus of this work, Sion, choir 1, exhorts, behold, and the faithful respond with single interrogative pronouns.

Behold, where, where, where. However, instead of just come, Sion also called to seek and remain. And the tension generated by the interrogatives was resolved by the statement in Yisuke Arman. So remember back in Come, Come, Come, Behold. And then a series of single interrogatives with no response.

[ 34 : 11 ] Creating tension. Now, with, um, at the end of the piece, towards the end of the piece, there is resolution to that tension.

Where, where, where? In Jesus' arm. So, come, seek, remain. Where? In Jesus' arm. Something built in the beginning, resolved towards the end. Okay. So, this is how this movement sounds like.

We will switch forward. Okay. Our next dialogue. Um, the green stuff. The tonality of C minor in Nun ist der Herr reminds the listener of an earlier dialogue movement, Ich will, five minor, yisuke, waukshön, which expressed the desire to put our sins asleep, to sleep.

Metaphorically, put the sin to death. So, earlier on, an expression of desire to put sin to death.

[ 35 : 39 ] And, when, this movement comes in, in the same tonality, we have the text, my Jesus, good night.

Functions as a response to, thus our sins fall asleep. Since the two dialogue movements are connected by common tonality, it is implicit that our sins are put to sleep with Jesus.

That's, that's the play there. Wanting to put sin to death. Jesus, good night. Same tonality, pull the two together.

That's what you get. Um, as a reminder, how the first one sounds like. And, here's the second one. The returning. Towards the end of the piece.

And, here is the plan. If you say, save it peace. I'm which you do. Good night. You are too hot. You are too hot. Use it water.

[ 36 : 51 ] Yeah, zap all sorts. Of ■■■■, in the meantime. When, who, who? This gesture of course reflects the idea that our own self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

The second part of St. Matthew's Passion, therefore, articulates the penal substitution view of theology of the Atonement.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, the scapegoat of the great Day of Atonement, foreshadowed in Leviticus 16, 20-22, was crucified by our sins.

Therefore, come, seek, and remain in Jesus' arm. Sin has been put to death with Him.

In sorts, in the short. We sinful creatures put Christ on the cross.

[ 38 : 14 ] Hence, at the end of this masterpiece, Bob gave us a reflection movement. Not a fictional scene involving disciples, but a scene for us, the church, the faithful, the thought of Zion, faithful to reflect on.

And Bob closes the passion with this text. We sit down in tears. When I call to thee in the tomb, rest softly, softly rest.

Rest ye exhausted limbs, rest softly, rest well. Because we sinful creatures put Christ on the cross. We mourn and we sit down in tears. Again, very good music. And we see how far we can get through without overtilling time.

Thank you. Thank you.

[ 39 : 40 ] The End The End The End

I'm sorry. Want to keep listening? Really? Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. I misread the room. I misread the room.

I'm sorry. I got the choir to sing. I think choir sang this before, right? Yeah. Yeah. See if Terry will do it this year.

I'll let you sing. Anyways, Bach ends the piece with a very low note.

It's a low note that's worth meditating on in the season of Advent. On our sins that's needed to be atoned for and for our sinful nature that we put Christ on the cross.

[ 41 : 35 ] And of course justification isn't the ends. Rather it's a means of glorification. For Christ put on the body of flesh and became obedient to the cross even to the point of death.

Therefore, not so that our sins will be forgiven. It's therefore so that He could be exalted and bestowed unto the name that's above all names. So that we, the sinful creatures, knees shall bow and tongues will confess that He is the Lord of Lords and the Kings of Kings.

So I'll leave the talk on a little optimism on this very low note and quit monologuing.

And taking a cue from our beloved Dr. Jim Packer, proceed into dialogue.

The first thing to say to you is, thank you, brother. That was marvelous. The second thing to say, I suppose, is, praise God for Bach.

[ 42 : 53 ] He was marvelous. And if other people are like me, the music has moved you at such a deep level that you don't really have anything to say.

And I haven't anything to say except that, well, it is simply a wonderful realization of the sensitive Christians' perception of and response to the reality of the cross.

And it does seem to be, just for the record, that the Lutherans were ahead of us all in the 17th century and early 18th through the Barbaes, in their faithful focus on the cross as the momentous event that changes everything for us, from hopelessness to hope, from guilt to acceptance, from lostness to foundness.

And they really went to town on the, how shall I say it, expressing it in an intimate, heart-plucking way, if I can put it that way.

I mean, Lutheran chorales, and that includes the Lutheran chorale material that Bach puts into the Matthew Passion.

[ 44 : 59 ] They've got this intimate, informal quality about them, which, well, it's just enormously moving, and in a quiet way, enormously thrilling.

It is God in love and mercy, Christ in love and mercy, coming close and as it were tapping us on the shoulder and saying, do you realize, do you realize, this is what I did to you?

And he keeps his hand on our shoulders, and his touch becomes an embrace. Well, Lutheran chorales often gave me that sense of the situation, and it's, like I said a moment ago, so deep a feeling that it's hard to put into words, indeed. Words don't catch it.

But that's the world into which this, it's a giant piece of work, actually, isn't it? It takes three hours to perform.

But that's the world into which it takes us. The world, it seems to me, of Christ with his arm, as it were, round our shoulders, and greatly content, in conscience, that is, we can now go to sleep.

[ 46 : 42 ] I'm sorry, I'm blathering, but I'm trying to express what this music does to my heart. Somebody else try. Jason, thank you for this. I always hear something I've never heard before when you talk to us about music.

You mentioned the librettist somewhere near the beginning. I've forgotten his name. The kind of. P-I-C-E-N-E-R. He actually sort of gathered the theology together, kind of like sticks for the fire, and Bach ignited it with his music. And I'm wondering if you can tell us something more about this man, who chose the words. Was he, for instance, a minister?

First of all, I must confess I'm not a historical musicologist. Oh. And I, I'm a theorist, and I have to confess that I don't know much about the librettist.

Perhaps Terry knows. The librettist of the St. Matthew Passion, was he, how good is his theology? Are you talking about the composer or the?

The librettist. The librettist? I would assume that he was, I would be surprised if he had a degree in theology. Way back then?

[ 48 : 05 ] Okay. Certainly would have been one of the ancient thinker's season well, read. And Bach, of course, we have his bookcase, and we know that he had bookcase full of Bluford writing, and theological writing is all marked in, so we know that he's very engaged in theological writing.

Well, Bach himself, of course, would not, I don't think, work with somebody who wasn't a Christian, and didn't have his own beliefs. That would be my point. I just, I point out to Dr. Packer, and I, I mean, it goes to that point of the librettist.

There's an intimacy in the language, which is, I find quite striking. Yeah. And there is a reference on occasion, earlier, to Bridegroom. I wonder if that subconsciously invoked in the first list is the Song of Songs.

As Puritans read the Song of Songs as the souls into the seed of Jesus. Jesus the lover, Jesus the one who puts his arms around him. So I wonder if it's meant to do that, or is there some theological distance at times?

Yes. Or both. Yes, yes. The motif of the bridegroom is built into the oratorio, built into the passion. I mean, every single motif that's highlighted in the opening choral fantasy was subsequently developed and incorporated into the piece.

[ 49 : 35 ] And that is the piece in a nutshell. One aspect I noticed is, you know, the emphasis on our sins put Christ on the cross.

And as one man put it, repentance is summed up in these, best summed up in these words, My sins, my sins, O Savior, alas, on thee they fall.

In other words, it's an aspect of repentance, specifically the emotional aspect, seeing the consequences of sin. If we picture, you know, Christ dying and dead, and this is what my sins did, and every time I sin, that's what I'm in fact doing, saying, I don't want you as my boss.

It's so very interesting how the Catholics did very well in this by putting Christ, I mean, the crucifix figure on the cross.

It's something that should give them a more recognition for. I mean, the same kind of thinking that Luther's movements are expressing here.

[ 50 : 47 ] Christ on the cross all the time. Christ. Anyone else? Bill stands up and strut the sign.

Or we're still sat down in tears. I want to hear a little more of them. It's a good moment to wish you all a happy Christmas in minor and major piece.

Oh, good one. And I hope to see you all back here in January. So you will rush out and buy some Bach, I hope.

And amazingly emotional. Amazingly emotional. And just wonderful. Just wonderful music.

Thanks so much, Jason. Thank you.